20 TIPS: HOW TO BE A BETTER ID PROJECT MANAGER

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Below are some attitudes and practices that could improve your effectiveness as a manager of Instructional Development (ID) projects. They are in no particular order. While they don't represent absolute truth, they may be worth thinking about.

1. **Hire the best,** most experienced people you can; this way your team will be able to anticipate and prevent problems before they occur.

2. **Do any menial work necessary** to keep your ID team going. (For example, while they are meeting with an SME, you could go make copies of the SME's documentation so you don't have to wait for the SME to send copies later.)

3. **Plan, plan, plan.** Use rules of thumb (project history) to lay the groundwork for a solid project plan and then review and revise it every week or so.

4. **Gather "post mortem" statistics** about your completed projects and make your own rules of thumb for use in planning your next projects. (For example: How long did it really take us to write a 10 minute video script? ...to conduct a developmental test debriefing? ...How much did we spend on shipping materials to reviewers? ...on catering meetings? ...on SME consulting fees?)

5. **Continually sell the value of systematic ID** to sponsors, SMEs, media people, and designers; make sure everyone knows that there's a bit of science behind your art.

6. **Know your own ID model cold.** At any point in the project you should be able to tell IDs, SMEs, media people, or sponsors exactly where they have been, where they are going, and what inputs they will be expected to supply.

7. **Communicate your ID model to everyone** (sponsors, SMEs, IDs, media people) so that everyone is "singing from the same songbook."

8. **Develop a Blueprint,** Design Document, Design Specifications, or some other detailed plans and get them reviewed and approved SMEs and sponsors before writing drafts. (Let them pick apart your choice of yarn before you take the time to knit the whole sweater.)

9. **Don't let your sponsors get out of making the tough decisions.** For example, if you're building training about a new product, let the sponsor mediate the disputes between what the marketing people say the product will do and what the engineers say it will really do.

10. **Don't let your sponsors get out of providing or approving SMEs.** After all, they are paying for and approving your results, so they should stand behind your content sources.

11. **Protect your IDs.** Make sure they aren't involved in political disputes, unnecessary reports to management, and endless meetings; handle these yourself so they can focus on designing and developing the best materials possible.

12. **Fight for enough time to do things right;** if time is short, negotiate to provide non-training solutions, instead of cramming a fat development effort into a skinny schedule.

13. **Understand that the brain is a physical mechanism** whose neural synapses require periods of rest to prevent them from becoming clogged with waste products and then malfunctioning. (i.e. -- Don't expect highly paid, creative design professionals to produce quality results on a ridiculously short schedule. You wouldn't try to run a race car without a pit stop, would you?)

14. **Fight for what is right.** It's okay to feel a sense of rightous indignation and dig in your heals in the face of decisions which threaten the quality of your outputs.

15. **Know when to give in.** Don't lose the war because you couldn't resist fighting every little battle.

16. **Get the sponsor to sign-off and approve your deliverables** as they are evolving. Make sure the sign-off form includes a penalty (more money and/or more time) for completely rethinking a deliverable after it has been approved.

17. **Think of yourself as a switchboard.** Constantly relay information and decisions to members of the design team.

18. **Stay on the lookout for IDs who are in pain** and find ways to help eliminate it.

19. **Understand that** at the beginning of nearly every project when facing unfamiliar technical content **almost all IDs think, "I've finally done it! I'm really in over my head** this time! I have no business being in this profession...Aargh!" Remind each of them that we all feel this way at the beginning of a project and that his or her track record shows that he or she will overcome.

20. **Foster a sense of humor and a "willful suspension of disbelief."** Put another way, if your sponsor is acting like Alice's Red Queen, then relax and enjoy the experience -- the White Rabbit may prove to be pleasant company.

Michael Greer is currently working on a book for Educational Technology Publications entitled ID Project Management, a comprehensive handbook for ID project managers. The book will contain many specific job aids, examples, sets of guidelines, and worksheets to help you manage ID projects. It will likely be available in the Fall of 1991.